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THE RHETORIC OF DESPERATION

R. L. FOWLER

For H. Ll.-J.

Quo nunc me vortam? quod iter incipiam ingredi?
domum paternamne? anne ad Peliae filias?

THESE are the distraught words of Ennius' Medea as she realizes the hopelessness of her situation.[1] The lines are quoted by Cicero, *De oratore* 3.217, who also quotes an example of the sentiment from a completely different genre, the political oratory of C. Gracchus.[2] On Ennius, Vahlen comments:

> Haec Enniana esse, ex Euripidis Medea translata Columna intellexit: apud quem cum dicat [502 ff.]:
>
> νῦν ποῖ τράπωμαι; πότερα πρὸς πατρὸς δόμους;
> οὓς σοὶ προδοῦσα καὶ πάτραν ἀφικόμην;
> ἢ πρὸς ταλαίνας Πελιάδας; καλῶς γ' ἂν οὖν
> δέξαιντό μ' οἴκοις ὧν πατέρα κατέκτανον,
>
> schemate usa est Graecis Romanisque perfamiliari; sed eius schematis esse proprium videtur, ut interrogationi subiciatur responsum, quo responso negatur id fieri posse quod erat in interrogatione; ut apud Eurip. et hoc loco et aliis (Suppl. 1094 sqq. Hercul. 1283 sqq. Sophocl. Aiac. 460 sqq.), ut Ariadna Catulli lamentatur [64] 177 "nam quo me referam, quali spe perdita nitor? Idomeneosne petam montes? ah gurgite lato discernens ponti truculentum ubi dividit aequor? an patris auxilium sperem? quemne ipsa reliqui" eqs. (cf. Sallust. Iug. 14,17). Diodorus XIII 31,1 ποῖ γὰρ ἄξιον τούτοις καταφυγεῖν; πρὸς θεούς; ὧν τὰς πατρίους τιμὰς ἀφελέσθαι προείλοντο; πρὸς ἀνθρώπους; οὓς δουλωσό-

[1] Ennius *Sc.* 217 f. Jocelyn = 276 f. Vahlen.

[2] *De orat.* 3.214: *"Quo me miser conferam? quo vortam? in Capitoliumne? at fratris sanguine madet. an domum? matremne ut miseram lamentantem videam et abiectam?"*

> μενοι παρεγένοντο; Δήμητρα καὶ Κόρην καὶ τὰ τούτων ἐπικαλοῦνται μυστήρια, τὴν ἱερὰν αὐτῶν νῆσον πεπορθηκότες; ut mittam alia et vulgata. Unde vereor ne Cicero, ut solet, non plena Ennii verba attulerit, et post *domum paternamne* quod fuerit responsum interceptum sit.

Among the "alia et vulgata" Vahlen might have included Dido's speech in the fourth book of the *Aeneid* (522–552), or Ovid's speech for Ariadne (*Met.* 8.113–118; see also *Her.* 10.59 ff.), or again Seneca's speech for Medea (*Med.* 451 ff.). Vahlen's argument that Cicero has abbreviated a longer speech is certainly correct. Cicero in his own orations provides several examples of what follows the opening cry, to wit a series of other questions in which various alternatives are raised, only to be decisively rejected (often by means of other questions).[3] In fictional literature, the situation in which these questions are asked is most often one of extreme crisis. The options are rejected one after the other, until the speaker lapses into a state of miserable helplessness (usually evident from an expressed wish for a speedy death); or, if he or she is of a more heroic bent, a decision follows that something truly dramatic is in order, suicide or murder being the commonest choices. Medea, of course, decides that she must kill her children in order to be avenged on Jason.

A speech of this type I shall dub the "desperation speech." All readers will be familiar with the famous examples from Latin literature just quoted; but with respect to the Greek antecedents Vahlen's adjective "perfamiliaris" may be too generous. Desperation speeches can

[3] The rhetoricians called such questions "hypophoric" (below, 35). See *Mur.* 88 (a thundering peroration); *Verr.* 2.3.166, 2.5.2, 2.5.126; *Flacc.* 4; *Scaur.* 50. (Some of these citations are owed to R. Bonnet, "Le dilemme de C. Gracchus," *REA* 8 [1906] 40–46.) The rhetoricians also had a name for the whole figure under discussion here, as Macrobius reveals (*Sat.* 4.6.11): *facit apud oratores pathos etiam addubitatio quam Graeci* ἀπόρησιν *vocant.* He then quotes the beginning of Dido's speech at *Aen.* 4.534. I have not found the figure discussed in any of the surviving rhetors; the name given by Macrobius does not appear in the indexes to Walz's or Spengel's *Rhetores Graeci* or Halm's *Rhetores Latini Minores*; nor is it found in J. C. Ernesti's indispensable *Lexicon Technologiae Graecorum Rhetoricae* (1795, repr. Hildesheim 1962). διαπόρησις, a facile emendation and a term also glossed by *addubitatio* in, e.g., Aquila Romanus p. 25.11 Halm, is different; it refers to perplexity about what to say in one's speech rather than what to do in a difficult situation (below, n. 26; note that Macrobius is also unique in quoting this passage of Virgil, while the other rhetors show their dependence on one another by repeatedly using the same examples.) It is unclear whether Menander Rhetor, 3.343.17 ff. Spengel, distinguishes or equates ἀπορητικοί and διαπορητικοὶ ὕμνοι.

be found to an astonishing extent and in subtle variations in Greek literature of all periods; to my knowledge this has been appreciated by only a few, and properly studied by no one.[4] The purpose of this article is to fill this gap by defining the characteristics of the form and tracing its development from Homer to the Classical period and thence to Hellenistic and Roman times. My primary aim is to provide an exhaustive list of Greek examples in these centuries, but I have also tried to suggest ways in which recognition of the desperation speech can be used for the textual and literary criticism of the passages in which it occurs.

Defining the Form: Key Examples in the Fifth Century

Poetry

Medea's speech in Euripides is not in fact the most complete example of the desperation speech that can be used to establish the norm. That honor belongs to Ajax in Sophocles' play (430–480). His speech falls clearly into two parts. The first begins with a cry of anguish, αἰαῖ, and goes on to outline the facts of the matter, Ajax's humiliation first by the Greeks and then by Athena. The second part begins καὶ νῦν τί χρὴ δρᾶν and contains his deliberations. This two-part structure has enough parallels that it may be recognized as the full version of the desperation speech, although the two parts can be collapsed into one, as at Euripides *Alcestis* 935–961.[5] Ajax's καὶ νῦν, which clearly marks the beginning of the second part, is in fact unusual; εἶέν is the normal

[4] E. Norden, commenting on Vahlen in *Die antike Kunstprosa*[3] (1915, repr. Leipzig 1958) 1 *Nachträge* 13, outlined the need for such a study; see below, n. 25.

[5] B. Mannsperger, "Die Rhesis," in W. Jens, ed., *Die Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie* (München 1971) 143–181, recognizes the structure of this speech as typical but for different reasons; she places it with two-part speeches "in denen die gegebene Situation selbst die Gedanken des Redenden erst in eine, dann in eine andere Richtung lenkt" (160). For other two-part desperation speeches conforming to the pattern of the *Ajax* see Eur. *IA* 442–468, *Phoen.* 1595–1624 (the cry of anguish at the beginning is somewhat submerged, but there nonetheless at 1599), *Supp.* 1080–1113 (with the deletion justified below, n. 45), *Hel.* 255–305 (a long first half with subdivisions, but everything up to 293 is clearly a preparation for that line—note τὸ δ' ἔσχατον τοῦτο, 287; the speech does, however, lack the opening cry of anguish). Medea's speech, too, has the same structure, if we disregard the interjectory lines 465–474 and 496–501; we have then ἐκ τῶν δὲ πρώτων πρῶτον ἄρξομαι λέγειν (475—explanation of background) followed by νῦν (502—present crisis). See also below, 27, on *HF* 1255–1310.

word for this purpose.[6] His question, however—"What should I do?"—is much commoner than Medea's "Where can I turn?" "Can I go home?" he continues. "What face will I show my father? Can I then make some solitary attack on the Trojan line, and redeem myself through some act of valour? My death in that way would only please my enemies. No, a man who is noble must either live well or die well. You have heard all I have to say."[7] Since it is no longer possible to live well, he will die well by committing suicide, thus establishing in the best heroic tradition that life will be lived on his terms or on no terms at all. Medea in Euripides' play begins in the same way: she asks first, whither shall she turn; then she makes two impossible suggestions in the form of questions (to my father's house, which I betrayed? to the house of Pelias, whose death I arranged at his own daughters' hands?). She then states summarily that she has made an enemy of the whole world for Jason's sake, and emphasizes the loneliness and helplessness that his desertion will mean for her. She concludes with a cry addressed to Zeus: why can we not detect counterfeit men as we do counterfeit coins? The normal desperation speech would give her proposed action at this point; but of course she cannot do so in Jason's presence, and anyhow the details are not yet settled. Euripides has, then, altered the usual form slightly, owing to the particular dramatic situation he chooses to use it in; but why would he choose to use it if it was, as it seems, inconvenient? The reason is that the form was already well known as a convention; the audience would know how appropriate it was to a character in so grave a crisis as Medea's. The dramatic point is that Jason too ought to recognize the danger signals; here is a woman who is pressed to the absolute limit and may do something desperate. But he is obtuse.[8]

Perhaps a few more words are necessary to show that the form *was* already known as a conventional one, and could therefore carry the dramatic message suggested above for the *Medea* (produced in 431).

[6] See Eur. *IA* 454, *Supp.* 1094, *Phoen.* 1615. εἶεν is followed by hypophoric questions at *Med.* 386 ff. and (with great effect) at *IA* 1184 ff. Compare also ἄγε followed by questions at *Med.* 499.

[7] The rhetorical flavor of this closing flourish is unmistakable; for other closing formulae and the implied influence of contemporary oratory on tragedy see E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus: Agamemnon* (Oxford 1950) 2.473 f. (H. Pelliccia rightly directs my attention, however, to epic precedents, e.g., *h. Aphr.* 289.)

[8] U. Hübner, *Philologus* 129 (1985) 32–38, argues that lines 490–515 are spurious; there is no space here to refute his arguments, which seem captious to me, and which do not recognize the literary form at work.

In Sophocles, there are no complete examples preserved other than the one in the *Ajax*, although as we shall see momentarily there are hints of the form in many passages and probably a complete one in a lost play. To prove decisively, however, that the desperation speech was a structure with the status of a convention, we need to do more than pile up examples, although the more examples one finds the more certain it becomes that that was the case. We need to find examples where the author is obviously manipulating the form, modifying and adapting it to new situations in order to make particular dramatic points. In this case it is plain that the author knew the structure had a regular or normal form; he had a sense, in other words, that there were rules about how one used this convention, and that these rules might be manipulated. The *Medea*, as explained above, provides an unstartling example of what I mean. More revealing, however, is a passage in Euripides' *Helen*. (This play, produced in 412, is admittedly late for testing a convention of 431; but it illustrates the point and provides a link to a play of Aristophanes that is close to the *Medea* in date.) Helen has a well-established character in the literary tradition, starting with Homer, as one who is forever feeling sorry for herself, wishing she had never been born.[9] In the prologue of Euripides' play this trait appears in a highly melodramatic and artificial form. At some length Helen describes her woes, then abruptly asks τί δῆτ' ἔτι ζῶ; (56). This question, or an equivalent of it, is typical in desperation speeches;[10] it recurs in identical form in Helen's "real" desperation speech later in the play (293). Elsewhere the question marks the height of agony and crisis; here it jars the audience, coming so early in the play. The tone in which it is delivered, after the posturing and self-pity of the previous forty lines, seems perfunctory, matter-of-fact. After the following scene with Teucer, Helen begins a song, picking up yet again the theme of her misery. This time she asks the Sirens to come and accompany her; in the second half of the strophe, where the diction is so overwrought as to be obscure, she seems to stop just short of wishing for death. The chorus enters, and together with Helen they continue the lament. They are the Sirens. For seventy lines we learn in lyric song what we have already learned from the prologue. The next episode begins with the chorus's matter-of-fact advice to endure life's misfor-

[9] *Il.* 3.172, 6.345, 24.764; Soph. *fr.* 178 Radt.

[10] See, e.g., Eur. *HF* 1301, *Hec.* 349; below, n. 57.

tunes as best one can;[11] Helen then launches into an elaborate version of a desperation speech. One could sense it coming. In the first part of the speech, much as Ajax did, she outlines the extent of her misfortunes. At line 293 she then asks, as at line 56, τί δῆτ' ἔτι ζῶ; Another rhetorical question with content equivalent to the first follows; then a mention of one impossible option (again in question form). We then have the usual resolution: θανεῖν κράτιστον.

In the next lines there is a difficulty in the text, which must be addressed if we are to understand fully Euripides' use of the desperation speech in this play.

θανεῖν κράτιστον· πῶς θάνοιμ' ἂν οὖν καλῶς;
ἀσχήμονες μὲν ἀγχόναι μετάρσιοι,
κἀν τοῖσι δούλοις δυσπρεπὲς νομίζεται·
σφαγαὶ δ' ἔχουσιν εὐγενές τι καὶ καλόν,
σμικρὸν δ' ὁ καιρὸς †ἄρτ' ἀπαλλάξαι βίου.
ἐς γὰρ τοσοῦτον ἤλθομεν βάθος κακῶν·
αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλαι διὰ τὸ κάλλος εὐτυχεῖς
γυναῖκες, ἡμᾶς δ' αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἀπώλεσεν.

298 προθάνοιμ' ἂν οὐ LP: corr. Stephanus
302 ἄρτ' LP: σάρκ' Hermann

Most editors have rejected lines 299–302 as an interpolation. They do not of course follow at all after line 298 as it is usually printed (πῶς θάνοιμ' ἂν οὐ καλῶς;), whereas line 303 does (although A. M. Dale thought that the progression was still difficult and supposed further corruption at the end of 298).[12] The chief objection brought against the lines is that they are inappropriate to the situation: it is impossible (so the argument goes) that Helen should pause at this emotional moment to consider how she can die in the most aesthetically pleasing way, as if she is concerned not to muss her hair. Wilamowitz called the lines "ridiculous" and asserted that they were forged by an actor after lines 352 ff. of this play and Sophocles' *Helen*.[13] Against the opposite argument that lines 352 ff. may defend 299–302, Dale says in effect that Helen's situation in the latter scene is not yet serious enough to warrant

[11] On this sentiment see further below, 32.

[12] A. M. Dale, ed., *Euripides: Helen* (Oxford 1967) 86.

[13] U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Analecta Euripidea* (Berlin 1875, repr. Hildesheim 1963) 243.

a real threat of suicide, and pronounces further: "A reasoned exposition in iambics following a lyric lament is one thing; a lyric rehash of sentiments already expounded in iambics to the same audience is another."

Dale's last point may be discarded at once; the whole of the parodos is largely a "rehash" of the prologue. Kranz showed how common this pattern is in Euripides.[14] As for appropriateness, we have been arguing that already in this play the normal tragic tone has long been abandoned in favor of melodrama. The exaggeration and sententiousness prevent us from taking things too seriously.[15] Moreover, immediately after the following ode, Menelaus enters for a scene that is, as everyone acknowledges, almost comic. That is incongruity on a grand scale. The incongruity of lines 299–302 should if anything be an argument for keeping them.

Furthermore, Wilamowitz's hint about Sophocles' *Helen* should be followed up, but turned on its head. The argument begins with Aristophanes' *Knights*. In the opening scene, Nicias and Demosthenes[16] groan under the oppression of the Paphlagonian slave, alias Cleon. Having outlined the situation for the audience, Demosthenes then says to Nicias (71–72):

> νῦν οὖν ἀνύσαντε φροντίσωμεν ὦγαθέ,
> ποίαν ὁδὸν νὼ τρεπτέον καὶ πρὸς τίνα.

Note the verb τρεπτέον; the question, if rendered into direct form, would read ποῖ καὶ πρὸς τίνα τραπώμεθα; We next have the enumeration of options. Nicias first suggests desertion, with a reference back to the punning use of the word αὐτομολῶμεν at 21 ff. Demosthenes points out in equally obscene terms that the Paphlagonian has all the exits covered. The next four lines (80–83) run:

> Νι. κράτιστον οὖν νῷν ἀποθανεῖν. Δη. ἀλλὰ σκόπει,
> ὅπως ἂν ἀποθάνοιμεν ἀνδρικώτατα.
> Νι. πῶς δῆτα πῶς γένοιτ' ἂν ἀνδρικώτατα;
> βέλτιστον ἡμῖν αἷμα ταύρειον πιεῖν.

[14] W. Kranz, *Stasimon* (Berlin 1933) 212. See further Mannsperger (above, n. 5) 173 ff.

[15] V. di Benedetto, "Note al testo dell' *Elena* di Euripide," *Maia* 13 (1961) 286–316, makes a similar point (295).

[16] On the identity of the characters see A. H. Sommerstein, *CQ* N.S. 30 (1980) 46 f.

Demosthenes prefers wine, and the play moves on. The parallels with Euripides' play are obvious: the opening question, an impossible option, then "best to die" in almost identical words followed immediately by the question "how." Now, the scholiast here tells us that Aristophanes is parodying Sophocles' *Helen*, and quotes two lines to prove it:

> ἐμοὶ δὲ λῷστον αἷμα ταύρειον πιεῖν
> καὶ μὴ 'πὶ πλεῖον τῶνδ' ἔχειν δυσφημίας.
>
> (*fr.* 178 Radt)

The parallels between Aristophanes and Euripides allow us to conclude that Euripides' lines in his *Helen* were also modeled on Sophocles' play of the same name.[17]

It is possible, of course, that an interpolator copied from Sophocles because he was too stupid to invent some lines on his own. The alternative possibility, however, is at least worth serious consideration: that the lines of the *Helen* are parody as much as Aristophanes', and quite worthy of Euripides. Demosthenes' ἀνδρικώτατα corresponds to Helen's καλῶς, Ajax's καλῶς and εὐγενῆ (*Ajax* 479 f.; note εὐγενές in Euripides, line 301) or Phaedra's οὐκ αἰσχρῶς (*Hipp.* 404, 411, 420, 717) and εὐκλεῶς (47, 423, 687). The manner of death is in fact everything to the hero; on it alone depends his claim to εὐγένεια.[18] Helen's place in the heroic world depends half on her parentage and half on her beauty. With the crazy logic of the comic parodist, Euripides reasons that for her the most important thing about death will be the camera angle. In Sophocles' play, Helen's desperation was presumably very real, her consideration of options noble and elevated in style; Euripides

[17] For λῷστον compare also Phaedra's κράτιστον at *Hipp.* 401 f. The comic potential of Helen is exploited by Aristophanes in the *Thesmophoriazousai* (see line 868, τί οὖν ἔτι ζῶ). R. Hirzel, "Der Selbstmord," *ARW* 11 (1908; repr. Darmstadt 1967) 75–104, 243–284, 417–476, draws attention (100 n. 3) to Middle and New comedies with titles like 'Απαγχόμενος, 'Αποκαρτερῶν, 'Αποκαρτεροῦντες, which suggest other plays where suicide attempts provided stuff for burlesque.

[18] In Aristophanes' parody πῶς is rightly doubled. πῶς οὖν θανούμεθ' ὥστε καὶ δόξαν λαβεῖν, Helen says later in the play of her name (line 841). In the *Hipp.* Phaedra's penultimate words are θανεῖν· ὅπως δέ, τοῦτ' ἐγὼ βουλεύσομαι (723). Note also *HF* 1148 ff., where three different methods of suicide are mentioned, showing that such material can figure in serious scenes. For a comic discussion of methods of suicide see Ar. *Frogs* 116–133, with E. Fraenkel's commentary, *Philologus* 87 (1932) 470–473 = *Kleine Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* (Rome 1964) 1.465–467.

has rendered Sophocles' elevation slightly bathetic, just as he amused himself at Aeschylus' expense in the recognition scene of the *Electra*.[19]

If this understanding is correct, lines 299–302 can be retained, and Stephanus's emendation of line 298 adopted; the change of οὐ to οὖν is very easy, πῶς οὖν being as common an idiom as πῶς οὐ.[20] A scribe could have changed either one to the other. The displacement of οὖν poses no difficulty,[21] and has the function of throwing καλῶς into relief.

We have, therefore, two passages parodying a play written before 424, in which all the elements of the desperation speech are identifiable. It is possible that both Euripides and Aristophanes were independently attracted to a single passage because of something unusual about it, rather than because it was a good illustration of something typical in the genre that could have been mocked from another place (e.g., the *Ajax*). Apart from the single item of the bull's blood, however, there is nothing striking or unusual in the content of Sophocles' desperation speech—and that item does not recur in Euripides. Nor do Euripides and Aristophanes coincide in any other detail of wording except κράτιστον and πῶς, which are unavoidable. What interested them therefore was not something outlandish in the Sophoclean passage, but rather its formal properties, which they turned to the purposes of travesty. The type of humor presupposes a sense in the authors that the form of the speech was a typical feature of tragedy. It is rather like raising a laugh at the expense of opera by presenting a buxom lady in cuirass and horned helmet; one may be parodying a particular scene, but the humor works primarily because of everyone's sense that this is typical of the genre. Similarly here: these two

[19] We do not in fact know which Helen play of Sophocles *fr.* 178 belonged to, nor indeed how many Helen plays he wrote or which one was the satyr play. If *fr.* 178 was satyric, our argument is not affected; both Sophocles and Euripides would be parodying the desperation speech, thus proving its conventional status.

[20] Dale's objection to it here is based on the assumption that the passage must be serious.

[21] J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*[2] (Oxford 1954, repr. 1970) 427. R. Kannicht, *Euripides Helena* (Heidelberg 1969) 2.99, argues further that after 299–302 we expect a choice between the two modes of suicide. In fact the decision is contained within the lines; they imply a clear preference for the second mode (understanding καιρός temporally—what sense can it make spatially?). Objections made by some to the style of 302 are difficult to measure, since we are unsure of the extent of the corruption. In 303 we shift back easily from "manner of death" to "death" itself, this being the import of the last words in 302; the γάρ of 303 is not difficult (see Denniston, *op. cit.* s.v. γάρ 3.2, 7).

passages of dramatic poetry establish such a sense for 424—and if we reasonably suppose that things like this need time and/or more than one occurrence to be established, we are not very far from the *Medea* of 431.

Prose

Two prose passages further illustrate the conventional status of the form. First is the story of Croesus, Atys, and Adrastus in Herodotus (1.34–45). The many tragic motifs in this story have long been noticed by critics.[22] Toward the end of it Adrastus, now twice polluted, begs Croesus to kill him:

> στὰς δὲ οὗτος πρὸ τοῦ νεκροῦ παρεδίδου ἑωυτὸν Κροίσῳ προτείνων τὰς χεῖρας, ἐπικατασφάξαι μιν κελεύων τῷ νεκρῷ, λέγων τήν τε προτέρην ἑωυτοῦ συμφορήν, καὶ ὡς ἐπ' ἐκείνῃ τὸν καθήραντα ἀπολωλεκὼς εἴη, οὐδέ οἱ εἴη βιώσιμον.

He recounts his twofold συμφορά (cf., e.g., Euripides *Helen* 269—she is afflicted not by one but by many disasters), then asserts that life is "unliveable" for him. This is a key word. In passages to be discussed below we will find the equivalents οὐ βιωτός and ἀβίωτος recurring many times.[23] If Herodotus were a poet and had produced this story as a drama, he would have written a desperation speech at this point. In view of our parallels, his οὐ βιώσιμον may be taken as an allusion to that form. Note also that Adrastus, his request refused, goes on as expected to kill himself. For Herodotus, then, recounting his prose tragedy, the desperation speech is something one can recognize as a typical element.

Finally, a passage that may be most interesting of all. Gorgias, often called the father of rhetoric, wrote several model speeches as guides for his students. If we are looking for consciousness of the rules of writing as evidence for the conventionality of a structure, this is the place to find it. One of the speeches is a defense composed for the hero Palamedes, falsely accused of treason by Odysseus on manufactured evidence. Here is part of what Gorgias makes him say:

[22] See the references provided by H. R. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus* (Cleveland 1966) 69 n. 67.

[23] See below, n. 58.

σκέψασθε δὲ καὶ τόδε. πῶς οὐκ ἂν ἀβίωτος ἦν ὁ βίος μοι πράξαντι ταῦτα; ποῖ γὰρ τραπέσθαι με χρῆν; πότερον εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα; δίκην δώσοντα τοῖς ἠδικημένοις; τίς δ' ἂν ἀπείχετό μου τῶν κακῶς πεπονθότων; ἀλλὰ μένειν ἐν τοῖς βαρβάροις; παραμελήσαντα πάντων τῶν μεγίστων, ἐστερημένον τῆς καλλίστης τιμῆς, ἐν αἰσχίστῃ δυσκλείᾳ διάγοντα, τοὺς ἐν τῷ παροιχομένῳ βίῳ πόνους ἐπ' ἀρετῇ πεπονημένους ἀπορρίψαντα; καὶ ταῦτα δι' ἐμαυτόν, ὅπερ αἴσχιστον ἀνδρί, δυστυχεῖν δι' αὐτόν. οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ παρὰ τοῖς βαρβάροις πιστῶς ἂν διεκείμην· πῶς γάρ, οἵτινες ἀπιστότατον ἔργον συνηπίσταντό μοι πεποιηκότι, τοὺς φίλους τοῖς ἐχθροῖς παραδεδωκότι; βίος δὲ οὐ βιωτὸς πίστεως ἐστερημένῳ.

Gorgias *VS* 82 B 11a 20–21

We recognize easily the elements of the desperation speech, modified to fit a new context. Note particularly the twofold occurrence of the "unliveable" motif. The character is not exactly in desperate straits at the moment (he will be if convicted); here, he says, on your assumption that I am guilty, then I would be in such straits. Since no one would willingly put himself in a situation like that, I must be innocent: a simple argument from consequences. The rhetorician has taken a typical device of poetry and found a way to employ it as a means of persuasion.

In doing so, Gorgias was following a procedure common to all the early rhetoricians. Poets had long known by instinct and experience how to achieve the finest effects in language; the rhetors carefully observed and catalogued the devices of the poets, formulated rules for their use, and applied them much more regularly.[24] From Gorgias the line leads directly to later orators, in whom the form recurs in various ways.[25] They will be considered below. For the moment let us note the

[24] For pre-Gorgian rhetoric and the contribution of poetry to it see E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*[3] (1915, repr. Leipzig 1958) ch. 1, with *Nachträge*; O. Navarre, *Essai sur la rhétorique grecque avant Aristote* (Paris 1900) 1–111; W. Aly, "Formprobleme der frühen griechischen Prosa," *Philologus Suppl.* 21.3 (1929); J. H. Finley, Jr., "The Origins of Thucydides' Style," *HSCP* 50 (1939) 35–84, esp. 50 ff.; G. A. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton 1963) ch. 2. There is a connection between this passage of Gorgias and Anaximenes *Rhet.* 7.11: λέγε δὲ (sc. ἀπολογούμενος) καὶ ὡς οὔτε ταῦτα τότε σοι πράξαντι συνήνεγκεν οὔτε νῦν ἐλυσιτέλησεν ἄν; apart from the content note the verbal similarity of πράξαντι.

[25] Norden, 1 *Nachträge* 13, draws attention to a parallel between Euripides' *Medea* and Demosthenes 28.18. He regards it as unlikely that Demosthenes was dependent on Euripides, and instead concludes rather boldly that the form was "ein fester, auf die frühesten

clear proof that Gorgias provides of the conventional status of the form: if it was not already so for him, it became so with him.[26]

Where did Gorgias get his inspiration? His use of the device probably suggests that it was already a prominent item of tragic style. Although it is possible that his sharp eyes saw possibilities in something that had occurred only once or twice, it seems unlikely. We do not know when the *Palamedes* was composed; let us assume for the sake of argument that it was composed before Gorgias' trip to Athens in 427. If it was composed after, then there is little doubt that numerous instances were available to him, since Euripides' *Medea* dates to 431 and Aristophanes' *Knights* to 424, before which time Sophocles' *Helen* was composed. However, by 427 Gorgias was well on in years, and his international reputation was already secure; it is entirely possible that his manual was composed in the 40s or 30s. So far as extant tragedy is concerned, the only complete example from that period is Sophocles' *Ajax*. Considerable argument has raged about the poetic models of Gorgias' style generally; although it seems to me that no one candidate is likely to have been his exclusive model, nonetheless the case for Attic tragedy is particularly good.[27] Could then this one speech in the *Ajax* have been the stimulus for the *Palamedes*? I

Zeiten der rhetorischen τέχνη zurückgehenden τόπος." He goes on: "Die Sache scheint mir genauerer Nachprüfung, als ich sie jetzt zu geben vermag, wert zu sein; die Entscheidung wird wohl erst aus einer sorgfältigen Sammlung und historischen Analyse der σχήματα διανοίας bei den Rednern und Tragikern zu gewinnen sein, an der es noch fehlt." Norden's conclusion is correct, as the passage from the *Palamedes* shows; to anyone familiar with this great scholar's work it is incredible that he missed it.

[26] The reflective use to which the rhetors put the devices of poetry is further evident at the outset of the *Palamedes*, where Gorgias has his character despair of how to proceed in his defense (*VS* 82 B 11a 4 Diels-Kranz): περὶ τούτων δὲ λέγων πόθεν ἄρξωμαι τί δὲ πρῶτον εἴπω ποῖ δὲ τῆς ἀπολογίας τράπωμαι The very fact that he is accused renders him helpless. A close parallel is provided by Andocides *Myst.* 8: σκοπῶ μὲν οὖν ἔγωγε, ὦ ἄνδρες, πόθεν χρὴ ἄρξασθαι τῆς ἀπολογίας (followed by enumeration of options, then κράτιστον οὖν μοι εἶναι δοκεῖ κτλ.) In Euripides compare *IA* 442, *El.* 907, *Med.* 475; see also Hyper. 6.6, Dem. 18.129, Isoc. 6.140. Many other parallels could be found in the orators; the rhetoricians gave this trope a name, ἀπορία or διαπόρησις (see, e.g., Tiberius περὶ σχημάτων, ed. L. Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci* 3.61.14; Alexander περὶ σχημάτων, *ibid.* 3.24.21; Aquila Romanus, ed. C. Halm, *Rhetores Latini Minores* 25.11; Julius Rufinianus, *ibid.* 40.32; R. Volkmann, *Die Rhetorik der Griechen und Römern in systematischer Übersicht*[2] [Leipzig 1885, repr. Amsterdam 1967] 496; H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik* [München 1960] 776–778). Homer, the original orator, gives us τί πρῶτόν τοι ἔπειτα, τί δ' ὑστάτιον καταλέξω (*Od.* 9.14).

[27] See Navarre (above, n. 24) 98 ff.; K. Reich, *Der Einfluss der griechischen Poesie auf Gorgias* (1909) passim.

think not. If one looks around in Aeschylus and Sophocles, elements and adumbrations of the form are easily found. In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, Deianeira, fearing the worst, says to the chorus οὐκ ἔχω τάλαινα ποῖ γνώμης πέσω (705); if the worst is true, she will kill herself: ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσαν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν, | ἥτις προτιμᾷ μὴ κακὴ πεφυκέναι (721 f.), words reminiscent of Ajax's. When the news is brought she exits silently and fulfils her promise. In the *Ajax*, Teucer, upon seeing his brother's corpse, asks ποῖ γὰρ μολεῖν μοι δυνατόν, ἐς ποίους βροτούς, | τοῖς σοῖς ἀρήξαντ' ἐν πόνοισι μηδαμοῦ; (1006 f.). He goes on to say that he cannot go home to Greece—what a reception he will get from Telamon!—and he cannot stay in Troy, where all is hostile. Palamedes in Gorgias' speech similarly divided the world. Teucer then cries οἴμοι, τί δράσω; πῶς σ' ἀποσπάσω πικροῦ | τοῦδ' αἰόλου κνώδοντος . . .; (1024 f.).[28] In Aeschylus the indications are scantier but probably sufficient. In *fr.* 177 (Radt) he tantalizes us with the question τί γὰρ καλὸν ζῆν ᾧ βίος λύπας φέρει, part of the play Ὅπλων κρίσις; doubtless spoken by Ajax. In *fr.* 47a, from the *Diktyoulkoi*, Danae, when threatened by the satyrs, immediately looks around for a noose (778 ff.); this is not formally a desperation speech, but it does illustrate the attitude that gives rise to them: death before disgrace.[29] Moreover, a trace of the form is visible in the alternatives expressed as questions (accepting Lloyd-Jones's punctuation); the rhetorical formula πάντ' ἔχεις λόγον which closes the speech may also indicate influence from contemporary

[28] Note further Tecmessa's appeal to Ajax, "Why should I live if you die?", *Ajax* 393 (compare Ismene to Antigone, *Ant.* 548, 566, and Eur. *Or.* 1072), followed by Ajax's ποῖ τις οὖν φύγῃ | ποῖ μολὼν μένω (403 f., in the ode preceding his desperation speech; on this see below, n. 43). From later plays: *OC* 1685 ff. (lyrics again), where Antigone wonders what fate is in store for her and her sister—what lands, what seas will they wander?—and Ismene replies with a wish for death, saying that life is no longer tolerable (ὁ μέλλων βίος οὐ βιωτός); in *Electra*, when the heroine learns of her brother's death, she says νῦν δὲ ποῖ με χρὴ μολεῖν (812) and straightway resolves to starve herself to death. *Philoctetes* 1348 ff. has all the elements in a somewhat unusual order: the passage starts with a death wish—Philoctetes' cry of anguish at the dilemma he is in; then we have οἴμοι τί δράσω followed by no fewer than six other questions. Of course in tragedy characters often have occasion to say "Woe is me, what shall I do?" without going on to deliver a desperation speech; or again they may say simply "what shall I do?" in quite neutral contexts. Compare, in Sophocles, *Ajax* 809, 920; *Ant.* 1099; *Trach.* 385, 390, 973; *Phil.* 757, 908, 949, 963, 969, 974, 1063 (a veritable forest of what-shall-I-dos); *OC* 216, 828, 1254 (Polyneices' opening words, followed by a supplementary question), 1738, 1747.

[29] See further below, 32.

oratory. More promising, however, is a lyric passage in the *Suppliants* (776 ff.) where the chorus asks τί πεισόμεσθα; ποῖ φύγωμεν; and continues with a repeated emphasis on dying in preference to marriage. The great passage of the *Agamemnon* describing the king's decision (βαρεῖα μὲν κὴρ τὸ μὴ πιθέσθαι, *Agam.* 206 ff.) could, with some generosity, be regarded as a desperation speech in our formal sense; certainly the situation is desperate. There are options to be weighed, and rhetorical questions are asked; the interrogative πῶς in 212 is typical of desperation speeches ("how can I" to mean "I cannot possibly," "how can I not" to mean "I must, I have no choice").[30] It is true that none of the really distinctive characteristics of the form is found, particularly the opening cry of anguish and some variant of "what shall I do?" In the same play, however, after the catastrophe, the chorus (in lyrics again) states ἀμηχανῶ φροντίδος στερηθεὶς | εὐπάλαμον μέριμναν | ὅπᾳ τράπωμαι (1530–1532), followed shortly by a death wish.[31]

These hints and adumbrations of the desperation speech—instances of its parts or of the typical attitudes found in it—make it probable that other fully developed examples would be found if more tragedies had survived.[32] We cannot safely conclude that Gorgias copied Sophocles'

[30] See, e.g., Eur. *Alc.* 913, 941.

[31] Further in Aeschylus note *Pers.* 912 τί πάθω τλήμων followed by a death wish (τί πάθω is often to be translated "what am I to do?": see, e.g., Ar. *Nub.* 798; the force of the colloquial τί γὰρ πάθω is "what else can I do?", cf. Ar. *Av.* 1432, *Lys.* 884, *Eccl.* 860, Eur. *Hec.* 614, *Supp.* 257, *Phoen.* 895); *Sept.* 297 (τί γένωμαι "what is to become of me?", equivalent to "what shall I do?"), 1057; *Supp.* 505; *Cho.* 409, 899; *PV* 904 ff. (οὐδ' ἔχω τίς ἂν γενοίμαν | τὰν Διὸς γὰρ οὐχ ὁρῶ | μῆτιν ὅπᾳ φύγοιμ' ἄν). *Pers.* 458 f., ὥστ' ἀμηχανεῖν | ὅποι τράποιντο, said of the Persian soldiers trapped on Salamis, provides a close verbal parallel to *Agam.* 1530–1532 (quoted by Fraenkel [above, n. 7] *ad loc.*). Io at *PV* 747 wishes for a speedy death, stating τί δῆτ' ἐμοὶ ζῆν κέρδος This particular variant of "why should I live?" has many parallels; see below, n. 57. Aeschylus' Philoktetes too wishes for death, cf. *fr.* 255 Radt.

[32] We remind the reader of the Herodotean passage (above, 14), which may imply full-scale tragic desperation speeches before Gorgias' ambassadorship in 427 (depending on one's view of the date of composition). A lyric passage worth noting: Bacchylides in poem 3 (468 B.C.) has Croesus berate the gods before stepping onto the pyre; there are two powerfully rhetorical questions in his speech, which ends bluntly θανεῖν γλύκιστον (47). H. Maehler, *Die Lieder des Bakchylides. Erster Teil: Die Siegeslieder* (Leiden 1982) 2.50, points out that this line, the poem's climax, well illustrates Bacchylides' interest in the πάθος of things—much like the later rhetoricians (above, n. 3). Bacchylides elsewhere (poem 18) betrays the influence of early drama. There is also a tantalizing fragment of Sappho (58 Voigt) where ἀλλὰ τί κεν ποείην occurs in a passage lamenting the onset of old age.

Ajax, and indeed there are no close verbal parallels.[33] Sophocles' *Ajax* remains, however, the earliest complete instance, and this may be significant. It may be objected that all the Aeschylean examples, Bacchylides' contribution (cf. n. 32), and many other Sophoclean passages are in lyrics, where we might well expect a freer departure from the normal spoken pattern; they do not therefore show that the regular form had not yet been established. Yet that so many of these early instances are lyrical is probably no accident. To put the sentiments of the desperation speech into trimeters instead of using the free, emotional expression of lyric song is to adopt a more argumentative, rhetorical stance. Sophocles was, after all, active during the great age of Sophism; rhetoric was already well developed in Athens before Gorgias arrived in 427,[34] and a great stylist like Sophocles would not be immune to its influence.[35] Moreover, it does not seem accidental that Ajax's speech establishes the standard against which all later examples

[33] Each of the major tragedians wrote a play about Palamedes (Aesch. *frr.* 181–182 Radt, Soph. *frr.* 478–481 Radt, Eur. *frr.* 578–590 N^2) and it is clear that the trial was traditionally a central part of the story. When Xenophon (*Apol.* 26) and Plato (*Apol.* 41b) both refer to the unjust conviction of Palamedes, Xenophon even to existing speeches in his defense, there is no justification in assuming an exclusive reference to Gorgias' *Palamedes*, as do James A. Coulter, "The Relation of the *Apology of Socrates* to Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes* and Plato's Critique of Gorgianic Rhetoric," *HSCP* 68 (1964) 269–303, Douglas D. Feaver and John E. Hare, "The *Apology* as an Inverted Parody of Rhetoric," *Arethusa* 14 (1981) 205–216, and Kenneth Seeskin, "Is the *Apology of Socrates* a Parody?," *Philosophy and Literature* 6 (1982) 94–105. Erwin Wolff's decisive contribution (below, n. 64) is not recognized by these authors. The parallels cited between Plato and Gorgias certainly show that Plato had read the orator, but some of the parallels disappear when it is recognized that they are common to many other speeches. If we had the tragedies it is highly probable that they would contain elements, if not complete examples, of the desperation speech, and would show that Gorgias and Plato are alike dependent on them. (Gorgias and the surviving fragments [including Sophocles *fr.* 432 Radt, assigned to the *Nauplius*] do have Palamedes' benefits to mankind in common, but these are traditional—see Aesch. *frr.* 181a–182 Radt; as the words stand, specific debts cannot be established.)

[34] See the references cited above at n. 24, particularly Navarre 24 f.

[35] For Sophocles see Finley (above, n. 24) 53 ff.; Reich (*ibid.*) 19 ff. The influence of Sophism on Sophocles in this instance I presume to be general, not specific (that is, a matter of rhetorical spirit rather than particular devices). Of course it is theoretically possible that some Sophist like Gorgias invented the non-lyrical form of the desperation speech, but the relation of the form's content to certain values at the heart of Greek poetry and ethics (as we remark here on Sophocles, and below 23, 32) seems to preclude this possibility, as does the eminent suitability of the form to tragic situations. The Homeric antecedents to be discussed presently as well as the Aeschylean material probably provided Sophocles with all he needed.

can be measured. The grim determination of the hero to live life on his terms and no one else's, to face death before compromise, is something we associate especially with Sophocles' plays.[36] It is appropriate that he should have taken the despairing cries of Aeschylean characters and turned them into statements of defiant action in the face of crisis, in other words, that he should have turned the song of desperation into the rhetoric of desperation. The poorly represented state of early tragedy allows no certainty, but with due reservation it may be suggested that if more of these plays were found, the first desperation speeches in trimeters would be Sophoclean.[37]

Homeric Antecedents

The story of the form's origin does not end with Sophocles. Ultimately its antecedents are to be found in Homer. Several times in both poems heroes in difficult situations are represented reaching a decision in a monologue.[38] For example, Odysseus in deciding to stand and fight says:

> ὤ μοι ἐγώ, τί πάθω; μέγα μὲν κακὸν αἴ κε φέβωμαι
> πληθὺν ταρβήσας· τὸ δὲ ῥίγιον αἴ κεν ἁλώω
> μοῦνος· τοὺς δ' ἄλλους Δαναοὺς ἐφόβησε Κρονίων.
> ἀλλὰ τίη μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός;
> οἶδα γὰρ ὅττι κακοὶ μὲν ἀποίχονται πολέμοιο,
> ὃς δέ κ' ἀριστεύῃσι μάχῃ ἔνι, τὸν δὲ μάλα χρεὼ
> ἑστάμεναι κρατερῶς, ἤ τ' ἔβλητ' ἤ τ' ἔβαλ' ἄλλον.
>
> *Il.* 11.404–410

The passage is preceded by a formulaic line ὀχθήσας δ' ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὃν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν, and followed by another, ἦος ὁ ταῦθ' ὥρμαινε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν. At *Iliad* 17.91–105 Menelaus has a nearly identical speech, including the preceding and following lines,

[36] See especially B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley 1964).

[37] The speech of Danae in the *Diktyoulkoi* might be thought to suggest Aeschylean examples in trimeters; but there are some grounds for thinking that play to be a late one with three actors (Lloyd-Jones, appendix to the Loeb edition of Aeschylus [Cambridge, Mass. 1957] 2.535 n. 1), and therefore susceptible to Sophoclean influence.

[38] These passages are listed and discussed by F. Leo, *Der Monolog im Drama* (*Abh. d. Gött. Ges. d. Wiss., phil.-hist. Kl.* N.F. 10.5, 1908) 1 ff. See also C. Hentze, "Die Monologe in den homerischen Epen," *Philologus* 63 (1904) 12–30; W. Arend, *Die typischen Scenen bei Homer* (Berlin 1933 [*Problemata* 7]; repr. Berlin 1975) ch. 7.

the formulaic ἀλλὰ τίη μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός in the middle and the opening ὤ μοι ἐγώ(ν). He does not, however, follow this ejaculation with a question. The speech of Agenor at *Iliad* 21.553–570 is identical to Menelaus' except that it does not have the usual line after its close. In the fifth book of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus is struggling to reach the shore of Phaeacia, the poet gives him one of these speeches no fewer than four times: 299–312, when the storm first arises; 355–364, after Leukothea has given him her veil and he wonders if he isn't being tricked; 407–423, where he despairs of finding a safe landing on the rocky shore; and 465–473, where he wonders how to spend the night, in the water a prey to cold or on land a prey to wild beasts. Each of these monologues is introduced by ὀχθήσας δ' ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὃν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν. They all begin ὤ μοι ἐγώ, except for one which has only ὤ μοι (408). One begins ὤ μοι ἐγὼ δειλός, τί νύ μοι μήκιστα γένηται; (299, cf. τί γένωμαι in Aesch. *Sept.* 297, as noted above); one begins ὤ μοι ἐγώ, τί πάθω; τί νύ μοι μήκιστα γένηται; (465). One of them, interestingly, contains a wish for death—not a wish for immediate oblivion, but for death before the disaster happened (line 308). We do not, however, find the line ἀλλὰ τίη μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός in any of these speeches. The omission is easily explained: in the Iliadic scenes, decisive action was called for on each occasion, and this line signals the reaching of a decision. The particular form the line takes is meant to underscore the hero's decisiveness; it suggests that consideration of the alternatives was only a moment's foolish aberration. In the Odyssean scenes, the hero finds himself in a thoroughly uncertain situation, where he simply cannot know what it is right to do; he can only try one of his options and see what happens. It would be absurd to have him say, "Why does my heart speak to me thus? A brave man would swim straight for the rocks!"

Homer does not use this complete pattern every time a hero takes action; he usually has special reasons for doing so.[39] That we have four examples in the fifth book of the *Odyssey*, and only there in the *Odyssey*, cannot be accidental. It is the first time in the poem that we have

[39] Parts of the pattern, for example the introductory and continuing lines, can occur by themselves; such passages offer useful contrasts with the ones discussed here: see, e.g., *Il.* 18.5 ff., where there is no question of action to be taken, but the form is well used for Achilles in his anguish; *Il.* 20.343 ff., 21.53 ff.; *Od.* 6.119 ff. ~ 13.200 ff. Odysseus' monologue at *Od.* 20.9–21 has no parallel; the poet has put extra thought into this striking passage.

seen the hero in danger, and the poet wants us to understand how critical his situation is. The reason Agenor is given one when confronted by Achilles (*Il.* 21.553 ff.) is that the action he takes is meant to contrast with that of the next man to be given such a speech, only 150 lines later.

Hector too is required to face Achilles. If he had been a less complex character, more like the blunt, honest soldier that Agenor is, his speech would have been similar, and his fate straightforward. As it is we have a unique variant on the usual pattern. It has the standard introductory line (*Il.* 22.98, ὀχθήσας κτλ.) followed by ὤ μοι ἐγών. Hector begins, however, not with something he might do now, but something he wishes he had done, namely, listen to Poulydamas. "But now," he says, using words we have seen were to become regular at this point in the desperation speech, he cannot go into the city for fear of reproach; better to kill Achilles or be killed εὐκλειῶς (110). He then goes on to consider an alternative: negotiation with Achilles. For eleven lines he entertains this impossible option, which according to the form ought to have been mentioned only in order to be rejected at once. Finally he says ἀλλὰ τίη μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός, and resolves to fight. Hector knew in his heart what the decision would have to be, had even mentioned it; that ought to have been the end of things. Yet he went on. The length of the speech here is only partly the result of the importance of this moment in the *Iliad.* The way Homer has chosen to alter the form betrays an element of indecision in Hector's character, which is the same as cowardice. As C. M. Bowra once remarked, Hector's courage is "less instinctive than deliberate."[40] The degree to which Homer elicits sympathy for Hector, and makes us see his tragedy, is not the least of the *Iliad*'s astonishing features. For all that we sympathize, however, and for all that modern sentiment may condemn Achilles' behavior in the poem, we must not be confused in the end; there is no doubt who is the superior hero. This realized, we can understand why Homer apparently denies our wishes and makes Hector run as soon as the monstrous Achilles comes within striking range.[41]

[40] C. M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford 1930) 202.

[41] For the interpretation of this difficult scene and its typology, see especially B. C. Fenik, "Stylization and Variety: Four Monologues in the Iliad," in *Homer: Tradition and Invention*, ed. B. C. Fenik (Leiden 1978) 68–90; also Martin Mueller, *The Iliad* (London 1984) 60–64; G. Petersmann, "Die Entscheidungsmonologe in den homerischen Epen," *GB* 2 (1974) 147–169. G. Finsler has some perceptive remarks in *Homer*[3] (Leipzig 1918) 2.225. For other formal anomalies in Hector's speech see D. Lohmann, *Die Komposition der Reden in der Ilias* (Berlin 1970) 37–40.

The similarities of these many speeches to the later speeches of tragedy are obvious. They all portray characters in distress (ὀχθήσας); they begin with a cry of anguish, and sometimes with questions equivalent to τί δράσω; they entertain alternatives and reach decisions. The speech of Hector, however, is different in one critical respect. Unlike the others, who find themselves in straightforward situations of danger, Hector faces a personal crisis affecting his whole purpose in life as a hero. The ethical dimension of this scene—which is, after all, the climax of the *Iliad*'s massive structure—provides the link between a stylized pattern of epic narrative that need not have developed further and the great scenes of tragedy where we find the desperation speech used to depict a character's inner agony. In Homer we see the beginning of the literary and philosophical tradition of προαίρεσις (Arist. *EN* 3.1111b5), the critical choice by which the ἀγαθός reveals the nature of his ἀρετή, tests the principles by which his life is led, or indeed decides whether that life is worth continuing.[42]

Refinements in Euripides and Plato

Now that we have seen the nature of the desperation speech and the main lines of its early development, let us return to the later fifth century to follow further refinements. Especially in Euripides one must be alive to subtle applications. Perhaps the most exquisite instance occurs in the *Alcestis*. In the kommos at lines 861–934 we find many motifs of the desperation speech (variations on "what shall I do?", death wishes); there follows a desperation speech in trimeters (935–961).[43] We have three rhetorical questions in a row, including ποῖ τρέψομαι; two impossible options are canvassed (Admetus cannot enter the house, nor can he stay out in public—mutually exclusive and all-encompassing opposites, in proper Gorgianic technique); he winds up

[42] See the fundamental chapter, "Prohairesis," in Erwin Wolff's *Platos Apologie* (Berlin 1929 [*Neue philologische Untersuchungen* 6]) and compare the remarks in his review of B. Snell, *Aischylos und das Handeln im Drama* (1928), *Gnomon* 5 (1929) 388–396 (to which Snell replied at *Philologus* 85 [1930] 141–158). For the importance of the notion of προαίρεσις in interpreting Herodotus, see H. Kleinknecht, "Herodot und Athen," *Hermes* 75 (1940) 241–264, and F. Solmsen, "Two Critical Decisions in Herodotus," *Med. d. Konin. Nederl. Akad. v. Wetensch., Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel* 37.6, 139–170 = *Kleine Schriften* 3 (Hildesheim 1982) 78–109.

[43] On this repetition of lyrical content in subsequent trimeters as a typical feature of tragic style, see, e.g., Mannsperger (above, n. 5).

with a miserable τί μοι ζῆν δῆτα κύδιον,[44] a sentiment which normally accompanies the death wish in other speeches. That, however, is the irony of the passage; Admetus cannot act on a death wish because the whole plot presupposes the opposite. The rich heroic associations of the desperation speech would be familiar to the audience; it would be obvious that Admetus does not fit the mould. While there is no doubt that his grief is genuine, the nagging doubt introduced by the ironic use of the form prevents us from sympathizing completely.

Quite impressive too is the speech given to old Iphis in the *Suppliants* after he watches his daughter leap onto the pyre of Capaneus (1080–1113). After a very brief kommos in which only the chorus has lyric lines, Iphis begins his speech with οἴμοι, and expatiates on how unlucky mortals are not to have a second youth and old age, so that the second time around they could correct mistakes like having children. At first, one has the impression that Euripides has once again chosen a poor moment for rhetorical contrivance. Consider, however, the rest of the speech, which begins with εἶέν at line 1094 and continues along familiar lines: τί δὴ χρὴ τὸν ταλαίπωρόν με δρᾶν; Three more questions raise and dismiss impossible options: he can go neither to his own nor to Capaneus' deserted, lonely house. His intention to commit suicide is then shockingly expressed:

> οὐχ ὡς τάχιστα δῆτά μ' ἄξετ' ἐς δόμους
> σκότῳ τε δώσετ', ἔνθ' ἀσιτίαις ἐμὸν
> δέμας γεραιὸν συντακεὶς ἀποφθερῶ;
> τί μ' ὠφελήσει παιδὸς ὀστέων θιγεῖν;
>
> (1104–1107).[45]

[44] In view of the parallels discussed below at note 57 κέρδιον is a tempting emendation (printed by Murray); but κύδιον is also used by Euripides at *Andr.* 639 and may be a deliberate *variatio* of κέρδιον.

[45] These words are very probably his last; lines 1108–1113 are interpolated. Their theme is marginally relevant, but (1) Iphis in the first part of his speech does not complain about old age in itself, and (2) the lines' foreign origin is betrayed by the words ἐπειδὰν μηδὲν ὠφελῶσι γῆν, which suggest a different context; there is no question of Iphis' helping anybody here. Moreover, our parallels (above, n. 5) indicate that the desperation speech, of which this is a very strict example, is a two-part affair ending with the death wish. Of course, the form is not a straitjacket, and an author might wish to extend it; but one might expect him to have some good reason. These lines, gnomically delivered in spite of a wish for a speedy exit (1104), do not seem to provide one. Moreover, lines 1110 and 1112 display the serious corruption often characteristic of actors' interpolations (see, e.g., C. Collard, *Euripides Supplices* [Groningen 1975] 1.45); and Plutarch's peculiar quotation of these lines as ἐπὶ τῶν τὰς μακρὰς νοσηλείας ὑπομενόντων (*Mor.* 110c),

The tone of these lines is one of unrelieved bitterness. This observation will explain the first half of the speech, and the lack of at least a few lyric lines for Iphis' grief. He is numbed by bereavement and beyond overt lament; his emptiness and disorientation find expression in the grim, even bizarre logic with which he expounds a not uncommon idea, namely, how one might do things differently given a second chance. The portrait is psychologically quite believable.[46]

Near the beginning of *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, Orestes asks Pylades, "What shall we do? Shall we scale the walls, or force the gates?" (96 ff.). Orestes can see difficulties with both these solutions, and admits that they may meet their death in the attempt. "But before we're killed," says he, "let's flee aboard the ship that brought us here." Pylades corrects his irresolution, reminding them of Apollo's orders:

> φεύγειν μὲν οὐκ ἀνεκτὸν οὐδ' εἰώθαμεν,
> τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ δὲ χρησμὸν οὐκ ἀτιστέον.
>
> (104 f.)

There is an imperative here that ought to have resulted in action. Orestes' speech, although reminiscent in its simplicity of Homeric decision-scenes, fails to find its proper conclusion as the hero's nerve fails him. The lines offer a typical example of Euripides' ability to infuse old forms with new realism. In *Iphigeneia at Aulis* Agamemnon is treated similarly. In the first part of the play his hopeless indecisiveness is evident. First he had been reluctant to agree to the demand to sacrifice his daughter, then was talked into it by Menelaus, although Menelaus denies it. After sending the first fateful message, however, he recanted and sent another, which was intercepted by Menelaus

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if not an inference from the passage itself read in isolation—and the inference is not obvious—are probably a reflection of the original context in another play. G. Bernhardy, *Grundriss der griechischen Litteratur*[3] (Halle 1880) 2.465, suspected the whole speech of actors' tampering, and pointed particularly to line 1112; otherwise no one seems to have suspected the conclusion. (I owe the reference to Martin Cropp.) For a similarly sententious actors' extension of a clearly finished speech (one of those, in fact, mentioned below, 30, as a parallel form of the desperation speech) see Eur. *Phoen.* 1013 ff., which, as Barrett remarks (on Eur. *Hipp.* 664–668), the actor has added "in defiance of the εἴρηται" and of ἀλλ' εἶμι (1009. See further E. Fraenkel, *SBAW* 1963, 1.52.)

[46] W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch* (Berlin 1926 [*Neue philologische Untersuchungen* 2] repr. Berlin 1966) 127–140, discusses this and other Euripidean speeches where passion is mixed with reasoned discourse.

before it could accomplish its purpose. When both Iphigeneia and Clytaemnestra arrive, Agamemnon is once more at a loss what to do and airs his doubts in a desperation speech (442–468). It begins with the couplet:

οἴμοι, τί φῶ δύστηνος; ἄρξωμαι πόθεν;
ἐς οἷ' ἀνάγκης ζεύγματ' ἐμπεπτώκαμεν.

(442 f.)

He continues with a mixture of reason and passion such as we have seen in the *Suppliants*. Here the theme is the disadvantages of a noble birth. The second part of the speech begins in perfect form:

εἶέν· τί φήσω πρὸς δάμαρτα τὴν ἐμήν;
πῶς δέξομαί νιν; ποῖον ὄμμα συμβαλῶ;

(454 f.)

After this, however, he does not continue with a consideration of alternatives, only with fearful apprehensions of the coming crisis. He has no alternatives. Menelaus is in a position to extricate him from his difficulties; on overhearing his brother's misery, he voluntarily withdraws his demand. But Agamemnon now reasons that Calchas will insist that the sacrifice take place no matter what he does, and the scene ends in helplessness (ὦ τάλας ἐγώ, | ὡς ἠπόρημαι πρὸς θεῶν τὰ νῦν τάδε, 536–537). In the next episode Agamemnon seems to muddle along, neither bringing himself to tell the truth nor finding a way to avoid the inevitable, all the while in inner anguish. No resolution is reached in this scene either; only the intervention of Achilles can solve the problem. In view of the portrait of Agamemnon presented in this play, it is no surprise that his desperation speech does not make the grade, ending not with a decision but only with another repetition of the cry of anguish (αἰαῖ, line 467).[47]

[47] Earlier in the play, Menelaus says to Agamemnon, "When the winds stopped and it appeared that you would not be able to sail to Troy, you were in a quandary,"

κἀμὲ παρεκάλεις· τί δράσω τίνα δὲ πόρον εὕρω πόθεν
ὥστε μὴ στερέντα σ' ἀρχῆς ἀπολέσαι καλὸν κλέος.

(356 f.)

The typical nature of these questions, and of the motif of εὔκλεια, is clear from these lines.

The greatest of the Euripidean desperation speeches are to be found in the *Hercules Furens*. There is a short one immediately after Herakles learns of his deeds (1146–1162). It begins with οἴμοι, followed by a wish for death expressed in question form, and two further questions outlining three possible methods of suicide. "But in the midst of my death plans," he says (1153)—he has no doubt what he is doing—"here comes Theseus." He does not want to pollute his friend:

> οἴμοι τί δράσω; ποῖ κακῶν ἐρημίαν
> εὕρω, πτερωτὸς ἢ κατὰ χθονὸς μολών;
>
> (1157–1158)

All elements of the form are here, but in a somewhat unusual way; the speech is truncated, never allowed to develop. If it had been, there is no doubt how it would have ended; Herakles would have killed himself. But Euripides does not want Herakles to die. Theseus arrives, and in the end is able to convince him to live on. The whole point of the conclusion has to do with the appropriate human reaction to the worst possible crisis; Euripides' answer is given in terms of friendship. The ending of the play is encapsulated in this first scene after the awakening, its meaning reflected in the thematic content of these lines: desperation cut off by the arrival of a friend.

At 1255 ff. Herakles is given the longest desperation speech in surviving tragedy (only Helen's, a somewhat special case, is longer). Its opening three lines seem almost detached, like a heading: listen, he says, I am going to tell you in perfectly rational terms why my life is intolerable, ἀβίωτον (1257). The setting out of the evidence in the first half of the speech is impressive and convincing; Herakles has a long tale to tell. He then comes to the current crisis in the second half, not indeed marked out by οἴμοι or εἶέν, but ἥκω δ' ἀνάγκης ἐς τόδε (1281) clearly conforms to the usual structure (background circumstances/past history followed by present crisis). The rest of the speech contains enough of the usual elements of the desperation speech to make it recognizable, although it lacks the trademark "what shall I do?"—for an obvious reason; Herakles already knows what he plans to do. Can he stay in Thebes, he asks. No, his pollution will cut him off from all human contact. Can he go to Argos? No, he is an exile from his native land. Can he go to some other city? No, he will be regarded with suspicion and hatred wherever he goes. Although abrupt transitions in this highly emotional scene are to be expected (see, e.g., 1346 f.), that between 1290 and 1291 destroys a natural progression to the closing of

a ring (ἥκω δ' ἀνάγκης ἐς τόδε, 1281 ~ ἐς τοῦτο δ' ἥξειν συμφορᾶς οἶμαί ποτε, 1294). The three intruding lines are also somewhat flabby in the context, and contain the notion that Herakles was once happy, whereas his whole argument has been that he never was. Wilamowitz was right to delete them.[48] The ring is closed, then, and Herakles sums up the extent of his catastrophe: the very earth will take voice and forbid him to touch her. The logical conclusion is given:[49]

τί δῆτά με ζῆν δεῖ; τί κέρδος ἔξομεν
βίον γ' ἀχρεῖον ἀνόσιον κεκτημένοι;

(1301–1302)

His suicide will surely follow; he does not need to belabor it. Instead, he turns his bitterness on Hera—let her dance a fling now, she has had her way and destroyed me.

Theseus' speech follows; Herakles responds to it with the most problematic lines in Euripides. To attempt a complete explanation of these lies beyond the scope of this article, but we may suggest that the preceding desperation speech, with all its rich associations, is relevant to the interpretation. In particular it is significant that the normal end of the speech, the resolution to die, is replaced by blasphemy against Hera. An equivalence seems to be suggested between the two ideas. Earlier, Theseus had warned Herakles against blasphemy (1244) and correctly perceived Herakles' suicide to be a threat against the gods, an attempt at revenge, as Marie Delcourt showed long ago.[50] This hostile, antagonistic attitude is dramatically replaced by one of great good piety in 1340–1346, even in contradiction with Herakles' own experience.[51] The volte-face is motivated by Theseus' friendship. It is notable that Theseus' advice elsewhere in the scene is very traditional and pious, the sort of thing that got ordinary Greeks through life: do not blaspheme (1242, 1244), endure the blows of fortune (1228), all mortals are subject to them (1314). One part of his advice is on the face of

[48] U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Euripides: Herakles*[3] (Darmstadt 1959) 3.266. Contrast J. de Romilly, "Le refus du suicide dans l'*Héraclès* d'Euripide," *Archaiognosia* 1 (1980) 2 n. 3.

[49] Wilamowitz deleted 1299–1300 for the same reason as 1291–1293.

[50] M. Delcourt, "Le suicide par vengeance dans la Grèce ancienne," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 119 (1939) 154–171. Her observations defend the authenticity of the line.

[51] He continues to accept that Hera is the agent of his destruction (1393); that line, however, contains no criticism of her motives.

it untraditional: he denies that human acts can pollute the gods (1232). A parallel for this sentiment is found at Sophocles *Antigone* 1044; in fact, it does make good sense, even in the light of tradition, to say that the gods cannot be polluted, since they are pure, ἁγνοί. Popular belief, however, held the opposite, that certain acts did defile the gods.[52] What is striking about this line of Euripides is its effect in the context, which is almost to suggest that the gods do not even care about pollution and that what is going on here is a purely human concern. That certainly is untraditional; so is the astonishing statement that pollution cannot pass between friends. However, a moment's thought reveals the ancestry of the claim. The poets had always maintained that the gods rule the world in their own interest, capricious and accountable to no one. They punish mortals, the innocent with the guilty, in order to ensure proper respect. A consequence drawn by Euripides in this play is that humans in misfortune can expect no sympathy from the gods, only from other humans. In moments when suffering seems to be all there is to human existence, the need for such sympathy becomes overwhelming for the victim, the giving of it a moral obligation for the bystander. The Epicurean doctrine of the disinterest of the gods, together with its ethical implications, finds a clear ancestor in this scene of the *Hercules Furens*.

One might be tempted to conclude from the presence of the desperation speech, and the frustration of its normal conclusion, that Euripides is suggesting the inadequacy of the traditional heroic code. Such a conclusion would be difficult to reconcile with the evidence of lines 1382–1384:

> ἀλλὰ γυμνωθεὶς ὅπλων
> ξὺν οἷς τὰ κάλλιστ' ἐξέπραξ' ἐν Ἑλλάδι
> ἐχθροῖς ἐμαυτὸν ὑποβαλὼν αἰσχρῶς θάνω;

It helps to realize that endurance can, on occasion, be as heroic as suicide, and that these two options were traditional alternatives. We need only think of the example of Odysseus, the hero who survives, to counterbalance the example of Ajax.[53] There is no inconsistency here;

[52] See R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford 1983) 145.

[53] See T. Thalheim, *RE* 2 A (1921) 1134 f., s.v. "Selbstmord," who quotes *Od.* 10.49 ff.:

> αὐτὰρ ἐγώ γε
> ἐγρόμενος κατὰ θυμὸν ἀμύμονα μερμήριξα

some blows of fortune do not involve humiliation or affect personal honor. Circumstances and perspectives can change. Herakles does not mean at line 1348 that suicide would be cowardly in all situations, only this one. Had Theseus not intervened when he did, suicide would not have been reprehensible at all; it would have been required.[54] When clinging to life is in no way consistent with εὐγένεια, an honorable death is the only option.

In the first part of the play, Megara finds herself in such a situation. She proposes to die with dignity, resisting her father-in-law's proposal to delay when he first makes it and resolving to die immediately when in the next scene Lykos crushes all hope (note the echo μηκῦναι βίον 143 ~ χρόνον δὲ μηκύνωμεν 87). To allow themselves to be destroyed in some humiliating manner is unthinkable. It is highly relevant to our concerns here that the speech in which Megara announces her resolution (275–311) has certain resemblances to a desperation speech: a bipartite structure, whose second part begins with rejected options expressed as questions; emphasis on εὐγένεια (292, 308) and ἀνάγκη (282). The echoes are admittedly faint, but that they are there is made certain by comparing other speeches made by characters who go willingly to their deaths, in which the echoes are quite clear: Makaria's at *Heracleidae* 500–534, Andromache's at *Andromache* 384–420, Polyxena's at *Hecuba* 342–378, and Menoeceus' at *Phoenissae* 991–1018.[55] In the *Hercules Furens*, then, Euripides contrives two situations in which exactly opposite solutions are appropriate. One is prevented from building an interpretation on the basis of the second

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ἢ πεσὼν ἐκ νηὸς ἀποφθίμην ἐνὶ πόντῳ,
ἢ ἀκέων τλαίην καὶ ἔτι ζωοῖσι μετείην.

Indeed one may wonder what other alternative there can be in the many passages in the *Odyssey* and lyric (see also *Il.* 24.49) that speak of endurance. See also Soph. *fr.* 319 Radt, with the parallels quoted there (to which add Theogn. 658, Men. *Dysc.* 281, *Sam.* 356, Herodas 6.39 with Headlam's note. J. de Romilly [above, n. 48] seems to miss this point in arguing that Euripides' innovation is his advocacy of endurance.) Compare also E. Fraenkel's brief remarks, "ἀπένθεια τλησικάρδιος," *Hermes* 68 (1933) 242–244 = *Kleine Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* (Rome 1964) 1.371–374.

[54] Theseus' offer of sanctuary may seem secondary to his advice to endure in his speech at 1313 ff., but his opening remarks (1202, 1214 ff.) strongly emphasize the importance of friendship and sympathy before turning to the theme of endurance (1228).

[55] E. Wolff (above, n. 42) 60, noted these parallels and cites Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 9.1169a18. Note that Menoeceus' speech is itself preceded by the typical questions, in this instance addressed to his father: ποῖ δῆτα φεύγω τίνα πόλιν τίνα ξένων (977), etc. (one each in lines 980–984). εἴρηται λόγος in 1012 is a formulaic and emphatic end to a speech (cf. Soph. *Ajax* 480 and notes 7 and 45 above).

alone. Euripides' purpose in writing was not to make some statement about the heroic code; he was more interested in showing characters caught in desperate situations and reacting as ordinary humans might.[56]

[56] We may relegate to a footnote other intimations of the desperation speech, "what-shall-I-do?"s of varying degrees of interest, etc., in Euripides. See *Cycl.* 193, 194 (the Cyclops is approaching; Odysseus resolves to die εὐγενῶς, 201), 309, 539; *Alc.* 380; *Med.* 359 (note ἄπορον 362), 386 ff. (εἰἑν followed by rhetorical questions in a speech that, while not desperate, is deliberative), 1042, 1271, 1376; *Heracl.* 440, 595 (an interesting twist); *Hipp.* 177, 673, 782, 877, 1066 f.; *Andr.* 513; *Hec.* 163, 419 (οἴμοι τί δράσω ποῖ τελευτήσω βίον), 737, 1056 f., 1079, 1099; *El.* 967, 1198; *Tro.* 508 (Hecuba's bitter death wish after a speech recounting her woes, cf. 1283), 792 ff. ("what shall I do?" twice, followed by a wish for death); *IT* 291, 1188, 1215, 1217; *Ion* 764, 858, 863, 971 (ἀπορία again), 1253, 1430; *Phoen.* 447, 734, 740 (ἀπορίαν), 1277 f., 1310, 1595–1624 (Oedipus; a perfectly regular desperation speech). Critics, led by E. Fraenkel, *SBAW* 1963.1, who would excise 1595–1614, have not taken this into account; the second part is so clearly true to form that it is crippled without the first. Certainly there has been rewriting; many of Fraenkel's objections are not to be spirited away. I suspect in addition that some reference to Oedipus' current misfortune like τὸ δ' ἔσχατον τοῦτο (*Hel.* 287) has dropped out before 1615 (M. D. Reeve's objection to δῆτα, *GRBS* 13 [1972] 465 n. 18, is not unfounded.) But a Euripidean original lies behind the passage. At the end, the strongly adversative particles of 1622 connect poorly with what precedes. The reference in 1623 to τὸ εὐγενές is true to form; in the original version the tone will have been the same throughout, that of a great and noble man in grievous affliction, but not abject. (The reviser has given his hand away by his extra "woe-is-me"s: Fraenkel 94.) There is no question of a change of posture at 1622 (Denniston [above, n. 21]). Fraenkel (96) wanted to delete 1621, but that only makes the problem worse; to my taste the line is not "dry" anyway but contains an effective anaphora emphasizing the idea of "killing," which takes the place here of the usual reference to self-inflicted death. The line also forms an effective bridge to the conclusion. There is an ellipsis in sense before 1622, however, to wit "I ask you to let me stay" (then 1622 "though I will *not* act the suppliant"); the extent of the ellipsis must be left to individual judgment, but I should print a lacuna of one line. For further discussion see C. Mueller-Goldingen, *Untersuchungen zu den Phönissen des Euripides* (Stuttgart 1985 [*Palingenesia* 22] 231 ff., who defends the passage in all particulars.) *Or.* 309, 596, 635, 722 f. (the statement of desperation, interrupted by Pylades' arrival; observe the conversation at 774 ff., after he is informed of the situation), 1022–1063 (something faintly comical here), 1072, 1376, 1539, 1610; *Bacch.* 1366; *IA* 1184 ff. (hypophoric questions introduced by εἰἑν used to great advantage by Clytaemnestra), 1366; *Rhes.* 580; *fr.* 139 N^2 = Ar. *Thesm.* 1128 f.; *Cresphontes fr.* 66A.52 (in C. Austin, *Nova fragmenta Euripidea in papyris reperta* [Berlin 1968] 44; see also A. Harder, *Euripides' Kresphontes and Archelaos* [Leiden 1985] 83), *Hypsipyle* (ed. G. W. Bond [Oxford 1963]) *fr.* 1.iv.15–19 (note ἄπολις line 18 and compare Dem. 57.70), *fr.* 20/21.10. Note also the actions of Makareus and Kanake in the *Aiolos* (as summarized by A. Nauck, *Tragicorum graecorum Fragmenta*^{2} [Leipzig 1889, repr. with additions by B. Snell, Hildesheim 1983] 366). We may put here for convenience a few passages of moderate interest in Aristophanes: *Nub.* 791, 798, 844; *Lys.* 884, 954 ff. (οἴμοι τί πάθω followed by questions in what is certainly a desperate situation); *Thesm.* 925, 1128 f. = Eur. *fr.* 139 N^2; *Plut.* 603, 605. See

Herakles reaches one decision, Megara another. The nub of deliberations like theirs is the question, "Why do I live?" or, as it is often put, "What is the gain or profit in my living?" (κέρδος).[57] At this point life is frequently said to be no longer tolerable; the *mot juste* is ἀβίωτος.[58] The act of desperation follows. The traditional view of suicide as found in literature is that under certain circumstances it is acceptable or indeed the only honorable alternative; high literature being what it is, these circumstances will crop up there more frequently than in ordinary life, where one might expect that the common person would accept the advice of a Tecmessa: give in to the blows of fortune, bend your stubborn will, and get on with living. Yet there are indications that in popular morality too, while suicide was normally condemned,[59] it was permissible or even laudable in certain situations. Andocides, for example, claims that the daughter of Ischomachus, preferring death to disgrace, attempted to hang herself.[60] We hear reports of defeated military commanders committing suicide in disgrace.[61] Thucydides reports two occasions on which the oligarchic Corcyrean partisans preferred suicide to death at their enemy's hands (3.81.3, 4.48.3); Timocrates the Spartan behaved similarly at the battle

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also Hermippus *Demotai fr.* 1 (2.385 Meineke = *fr.* 14 Kock): οἴμοι τί δράσω σύμβολον κεκαρμένος Cratinus *fr.* 346 Kassel-Austin.

[57] In Homeric decision-scenes not represented as monologues (except *Od.* 5.474) it is normal to end with the formulaic line ὣδε δέ οἱ φρονέοντι δοάσσατο κέρδιον εἶναι (see, e.g., *Il.* 13.458; Arend [above, n. 38] 110 ff. Note also Hector's word κέρδιον at *Il.* 22.108.) For both forms of the question (with or without κέρδος) in later authors see Aesch. *PV* 747 (cf. *fr.* 177 Radt, quoted above, 17); Soph. *Ant.* 463–464, *Ajax* 393, 475 f.; Eur. *HF* 1301 (where Bond refers to Page on *Med.* 145 and Kannicht on *Hel.* 56, and adds Ar. *Thesm.* 868), *Med.* 798, *Alc.* 960 (κύδιον, see above n. 44), *Andr.* 404 (ἡδύ ~ τέρπειν in Soph. *Aj.* 475), *Or.* 1072; Plato *Apol.* 37c, *Crito* 53c; Philemon *fab. inc. fr.* 42.1 (4.49 Meineke = *fr.* 104.1 Kock); PSorbonne 72.141 (in *Menandri Reliquiae Selectae*, ed. F. H. Sandbach [Oxford 1972], *inc. auct.*, p. 333, l. 141).

[58] See Soph. *OC* 1693; Gorgias *Pal.* 20–21; Hdt. 1.45; Eur. *HF* 1257, *Alc.* 242; Philemon *fab. inc. fr.* 5 (4.34 Meineke = *fr.* 90 Kock: people who grieve excessively at misfortune say ἀβίωτος ὁ βίος, οὐκέτι ὄψομαι, ἀπόλωλα); Plato, *Apol.* 38a; [Dem.] 60.31.

[59] See Plato *Phaedo* 61c ff.; *Laws* 9.873c; Eur. *fr.* 1070 N^2; Arist. *EN* 3.1116a12.

[60] Andoc. 1.125. Compare the actions of Danae in the *Diktyoulkoi*, Kanake in the *Aiolos*, and Athenian women according to Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1051; note also the law on Keos (Strabo 10.486, quoting Menander *fr.* 797.2 Koerte), which probably permitted suicide without ritual pollution for those overburdened by the afflictions of old age (for this interpretation see T. Thalheim, above, n. 53); Dem. 57.70; *SVF* 3.768. See further K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality* (Oxford 1974) 168 f.; Wilamowitz (above, n. 48) 3.253 f.

[61] See R. Hirzel (above, n. 17) 89 n. 1.

of Rhium (2.92.3). Plato expressly excludes from the ritually impure the suicide αἰσχύνης τινὸς ἀπόρου καὶ ἀβιώτου μεταλαχών;[62] in doing so he was presumably reflecting ordinary opinion (cf. Arist. *EN* 5.1138a13).

The same attitude that death can be preferable to life is often displayed in situations where suicide is not the form of death in question.[63] This is the case in the last and most impressive example of a desperation speech from the classical period: the Platonic *Apology of Socrates*.[64] After Socrates' conviction, the prosecution proposes the death penalty. Socrates' first counter-proposal is that he be maintained

[62] *Laws* 9.873c. The manuscripts and modern editions give ἀβίου, but in view of Aesop *fab.* 17 Hausrath = 17 Perry ἐπειδὴ δι' αἰσχύνην ἀβίωτον ἡγεῖτο τὸν βίον ἔχειν and the parallels given above at n. 58, it is plain that ἀβιώτου should be read. The emendation was made long ago by Valckenaer and Boeckh; in his refutation, G. Stallbaum, *Platonis Opera Omnia* 10.3 *Leges IX–XII et Epinomis* (1860, repr. New York and London 1980) 86, is able to quote only Bekker, *Anec. Gr.* 1.323.20 to show that ἄβιος (which normally means "starving") occurred in Euripides in the sense of δύσβιος. This used to be *fr.* 1065 Dindorf. Nauck (preface to his edition, p. X) ejected the fragment on the grounds that it referred to *Ion* 764. (The gloss was duly copied into the lexicon of Photius [α37 Theodoridis], where Nauck's opinion is endorsed by the editor.) However, ἄβιος owes its existence there only to Hermann's conjecture; ἀβίοτος is the correct reading. The gloss should be restored as a fragment of Euripides. This will still not save the Platonic passage, however. By formation ἄβιος might mean "unliveable," like ἀβίοτος; but as a matter of usage ἀβίωτος serves the purpose in all other examples in classical prose and all, apparently, but this one poetic instance in Euripides. There is no reason for Plato to be poetic in a casual reference to a common value.

[63] See, e.g., Soph. *fr.* 488 (with further parallels quoted by Pearson *ad loc.*); Eur. *Heracl.* 200 f., *Or.* 1152, *Cycl.* 201 f., *frr.* 293 N^2, 361, 596 = Critias, *TrGF* 43 F 12; *TrGF Adespota* 537; Isoc. 2.36, 4.95, 6.109, 15.177 (with allusion to Plato's *Apology*, cf. 272); Hyper. 6.24 (an epitaphian oration, where the idea is bound to occur), Plato, *Crito* 48b, *Menex.* 246d (ἀβίωτον again), Dem. 18.205, [60.27] (an epitaphian oration); Xen. *HG* 4.4.6 (ἀβίωτον once more). Note also the passages quoted above, 30. Contrast Eur. *IA* 1252, *Or.* 414 f. For the death wish (often taking the form "may I die before seeing such-and-such") in early poetry see G. Vagnone, "Aspetti formulari in Stesicoro, *Pap. Lille* 76 a b c: il desiderio di morte," *QUCC* N.S. 12 (1982) 35–42.

[64] For Socrates' heroic attitude, see B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley 1964) 58; for the form of the second part of Socrates' speech (§§ 36–38) see E. Wolff (above, n. 42) 47 ff. Wolff is the only critic of Plato to have placed the *Apology* in the correct perspective of the desperation speech (G. W. Bond on Eur. *HF* 1281–1290 cites Wolff and correctly identifies the form at work in that play). However, while singling out some key passages in Homer and Euripides and the *Palamedes* of Gorgias, Wolff does not mention many other important examples. (At p. 55 n. 1 he says he hopes to give "in the near future" a detailed historical study of what he calls the "prohairetic" speech; regrettably, he never did so: see the obituary by W. Schadewaldt, *Gnomon* 39 [1967] 319.) On the relation of the *Apology* to the *Palamedes* of Gorgias see above, n. 33.

at public expense for the rest of his life. He does not know if death is good or bad; why should he propose something instead that he knows is bad? Imprisonment? What kind of life would that be? A fine, with imprisonment until paid? Since he has no money, that amounts to the same thing. Exile? He will receive the same treatment in other cities. Will he agree to give up his philosophy, the source of all this trouble with the public? Then the famous line: "The unexamined life is not worth living," οὐ βιωτός. This is the point at which Socrates will not compromise; and so he proposes a penalty which he knows full well the jury must reject in favor of the prosecution's proposal. Plato has cast Socrates in the defiant, heroic mold; he is actually compared with Achilles earlier in the work, with Palamedes and Ajax later on. The rhetoric of desperation is used to underscore the point, even if Socrates' attitude is from another point of view anything but desperate. Plato's readers would have understood.[65]

Developments after the Fifth Century

The development of the form in post-classical centuries remains to be discussed, not as an obligatory coda in a study with pretensions to completeness but as an important link in a living literary tradition. Our attention will first be claimed by the fourth-century orators, to whom the *Apology*, ostensibly a speech delivered in court, provides a convenient bridge. The form of the desperation speech does not appear as purely in the *Apology* as it does in our poetic examples; it is less concise and lacks some key phrases such as τί δράσω (although εἶἑν—see note 6 above—introduces four questions at 36b3). Its suicide wish, if it is that, takes a most peculiar form. The question-and-answer sequence in the middle and the keywords οὐ βιωτός do, however, indicate the

[65] The rich literary associations of this passage make it probable that Plato has greatly expanded the original speech. (Note his use of the conventions again at *Crito* 53c.) Strictly speaking, the presence of this form does not imply that Socrates deliberately sought conviction and in effect committed suicide; it merely reflects Plato's attitude towards Socrates as the hero of philosophy. There can be no compromise of truth. On the other hand, its presence lends some credence to Xenophon's claim that Socrates was deliberately arrogant in speech; even if Xenophon is dependent on Plato, this point is made by him at the outset of his defense and claimed as the one thing on which everyone agrees (*Apol.* 1, cf. 32). The desperation speech in Plato would suggest to the ordinary educated man exactly the sort of attitude Xenophon claims for Socrates, a pragmatic calculation that there was no κέρδος left in life, and that it was unliveable (see especially *Apol.* 9). One is tempted to guess that Xenophon judged Plato's *Apology* counterproductive, and so put the matter in terms that the reading public would find more persuasive.

presence of the form. Orators who use it make similar changes; the complete version was too well marked as belonging to high literature and would seem impossibly contrived, even in an Athenian court. Still, there are some passages of note in surviving speeches. In his speech *On the Mysteries*, Andocides reports his internal debate upon hearing Charmides' appeal (50 f.). The tell-tale question "What shall (or was I) to do?" does not appear, but he does begin by calling himself most wretched of men, and enumerates his options in question form. That he reports his deliberations in the form of a monologue is a deliberately dramatic touch.[66] In the peroration he claims, with echoes of Homer, that the jury must take the place of his brothers and children: εἰς ὑμᾶς καταφεύγω καὶ ἀντιβολῶ καὶ ἱκετεύω. His earnest plea is preceded by a series of rhetorical questions which ask, in a way, πρὸς τίνα τράπωμαι; Aeschines, in a revealing passage (3.209), warns the jurors to ignore Demosthenes' "tearful" plea ποῖ καταφύγω and to ask instead ὁ δὲ δῆμος ὁ Ἀθηναίων ποῖ καταφύγῃ, Δημόσθενες; πρὸς ποίαν συμμάχων παρασκευήν; πρὸς ποῖα χρήματα; Demosthenes (14.31–32), in a passage with some similarity to Gorgias' *Palamedes* in that both offer arguments from consequences, asks:

> ποῖ γὰρ αὐτὸς τρέψεται μετὰ ταῦτα; εἰς Φρυγίαν ἐλθὼν δουλεύσει; οὐ γὰρ ὑπὲρ ἄλλου τινός ἐστιν ὁ πρὸς τὸν βάρβαρον πόλεμος ἢ περὶ χώρας καὶ βίου καὶ ἐθῶν καὶ ἐλευθερίας καὶ πάντων τῶν τοιούτων. τίς οὖν οὕτως δυστυχής ἐστιν ὅστις ἑαυτόν, γονέας, τάφους, πατρίδα εἵνεκα κέρδους βραχέος προέσθαι βουλήσεται;

It is very natural in defending one's actions to claim that no alternative was available, so that the question "What could I do?" comes easily to the lips: e.g., Dem. 18.69, 32.12. It is natural too to follow with other questions giving impossible alternatives: see, e.g., Dem. [12.15], 18.28, 28.18 (ποῖ δ' ἂν τραποίμεθα). This type of question has a recognized name in the catalogue of tropes; it is the so-called "hypophoric" question, used to forestall opponents' objections.[67] This trope can be used in

[66] Below at 57 he asks τί ἂν ὑμῶν ἕκαστος ἐποίησεν and proceeds, interestingly, to deny that his was a normal sort of desperation, where the choice lay between death and dishonor.

[67] See R. Volkmann (above, n. 26) 493, quoting Andoc. 1.148, Lys. 12.40, 82 ff.; C. Rehdantz, ed., *Demosthenes: Neun philippischen Reden*, 4. Aufl. v. F. Blass (Leipzig 1886) 2.2 (indices) 34 f.

many contexts apart from desperation speeches, and the orators furnish dozens of examples. Reference to Isaeus 2.21, 5.45 f., Andoc. *De pace* 14, Aeschin. 3.230 [Dem.] 35.47 f. and Thuc. 1.80.3 (a speech) will suffice. That this trope was the object of early study by rhetoricians is shown by the passage in the *Palamedes* of Gorgias.[68]

A brief look at the Hellenistic period will complete our survey. If one had to guess how the desperation speech would appear in New Comedy, one might suppose that it would be placed in the mouths of young men denied access to their mistresses. This expectation would not prove entirely false. Although the full-fledged tragic version is not found, another type of speech, a convention of New Comedy in its own right, can remind one strongly of the desperation speech: a speech (normally a soliloquy) made by a young man claiming that he is the most miserable person in the world. Such speeches sometimes include consideration of options and death wishes, although they often do not. Few of these survive in Menander, as it happens, but there is one at *Aspis* 284 ff., where Chaereas enters and laments his misfortune, ending with the sentiment that he does not expect to see the rest of his life. At *Samia* 91, Moschion, finishing a speech of unknown length and in a dither over the subterfuge he must commit, blurts out οὐκ ἀπάγξομαι ταχύ; the line before contains the word ἀθλιώτερον. A more revealing example of this type of speech's affinities with the desperation speech is found in Plautus' *Mercator* (a play based on an original by Philemon). Charinus' lament at 335 ff. begins with the tell-tale "Homo me miserior nullust aeque"; further on, an impossible option is rejected in a rhetorical question. When Charinus fails to forestall his father's plans, which will deprive him of his beloved, he continues (468 ff.):

> nullus sum, occidi.
> Pentheum diripuisse aiiunt Bacchas: nugas maximas
> fuisse credo, praeut quo pacto ego divorsus distrahor.
> qur ego veivo? qur non morior? quid mihist in vita boni?
> actumst, ibo ad medicum atque ibi me toxico morti dabo,
> quando id mi adimitur qua caussa vitam cupio vivere.

[68] See above, nn. 24–26.

Possibly the most interesting example of something like a desperation speech is to be found, however, in a quite different context: the speech of Euclio in Plautus' *Aulularia* (713–726). It is the climax of the dramatic action; Euclio has finally lost his pot of gold, and is racing frantically about the stage. It is true that there is no reasoned consideration of alternatives, only a patter of confused questions; but one could hardly expect otherwise in the situation. We do not find the determined resolve to die that a desperate hero should display, only a repeated insistence on his misery; but at one point Euclio does say revealingly, "nam quid in opust vita" (723), i.e., τί τὸ ζῆν ὄφελός ἐστιν; (cf. *Merc.* 471, quoted above). This undoubtedly came directly from the Greek original. It is not difficult to see what Plautus, with his sure sense of the stage, has added: the clownishness of Euclio, his wild exaggeration, his comical appeals to the audience, and his song.[69]

Finally, mention must be made of Medea's deliberation in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius (3.771–801). The reflective, introspective twist the author puts on the old form—which is here represented as a silent, internal debate, held in the dead of night—points the way to Virgil's penetrating psychological study of Dido in *Aeneid* 4, where the

[69] See further *Cist.* 671, a scene with many similarities to this one; *Rud.* 204–220, 664–676; the opening scene of Ter. *Eun.*, which Donatus (on line 46, 1.278 Wessner = Men. *fr.* 161 Koerte) tells us began with the same line (ἀλλὰ τί ποιήσω) in Menander; Ter. *Ad.* 4.4. Another stock situation, the resourceful slave engaged in concocting a plan, can contain some elements of the form: see, e.g., Ter. *Andr.* 206–214, *Heaut.* 674–678. A few passages of related interest in Menander may be cited here. *Dysc.* 379 f. and *Per.* 977 f. both express a wish to die if the girl is not to be had (the latter beginning ἀλλὰ τί ποιήσω, πῶς βιώσομαι). In Terence's *Adelphoe*, based on Menander's play of the same name, Ctesipho had talked of leaving the country, one presumes into mercenary service (275); Donatus (2.62 Wessner) informs us that in Menander the talk had been of suicide. (For other references to suicide in Roman and New Comedy R. Kassel refers to K. Dziatzko, ed., *Phormio*, 3. Aufl. v. E. Hauler [Leipzig 1898] 149 on 686; see also Philemon *fr.* 136 with R. Kassel's remarks, *Gnomon* 34 [1962] 556.) Other situations than romantic ones may evoke similar anguish: at *Asp.* 282 f., Chaerestratos, mortified that Smikrines will marry his daughter, wishes for death in the formulaic way, "may I die before I see . . ." (for this see Vagnone, above n. 63); see also 314 f.; the Samian woman, fearing Nikeratos' temper, cries ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγώ, τί δράσω ποῖ φύγω (*Sam.* 568 f.); the slave Onesimos, fearing for his hide, exclaims καὶ ποῖ τράπωμαί γ' εἰς τί βουλῆς οἴχομαι, ἀπόλωλα . . . (*Epitr.* 905 f.). In the tatters after *Mis.* 390 there are some hints, at least, of the typical setting of a desperation speech (τὸ ζῆν ἀφήσεις . . . καὶ τίς ὁ βίος σοι). Knemon at *Dysc.* 160 claims his life is intolerable and ten lines later curiously complains that there is not enough room left anywhere for a man even to hang himself. Of course, the phrase "what am I to do?" *vel sim.* occurs by itself many times in New and Roman Comedy.

classic desperation speech (522–552) follows the rich scene of confrontation with Aeneas and the consultation with Anna, and is followed by the fearsome curse and revenge through suicide.[70]

With that we find ourselves at the heart of Latin literature, and have come full circle to the starting-point of our investigations. The many rhetorical and literary uses made of the form by the Romans would make an interesting study in their own right, but they must be left for another place; our aim has been to illuminate the Greek background. All ancient writers were intensely aware of the tradition in which they worked; this awareness shows itself in their continual manipulation of literary models, genres, commonplaces, rhetorical devices, and so on. The study of ancient literature demands sensitivity to tradition and the individual talent; both must be given their due, and the dangers of excessive stress on either must be avoided. Appreciation of a topos can open one's eyes to aspects of a passage that had previously been ignored; one is then tempted, however, to lay too much stress on the force of the tradition, and pay insufficient attention to the aims of the author. Whether this temptation has been resisted in the present study, the reader may judge.[71]

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[70] On revenge by suicide see M. Delcourt (above, n. 50). One other Hellenistic passage of minor note may be mentioned: the sillographer Timon of Phlius (*Supplementum Hellenisticum*, eds. H. Lloyd-Jones, P. J. Parsons [Berlin 1983] nos. 775–848) parodied the Homeric form of the desperation speech in a passage about the deceived student who regrets having gone to the school of a dogmatist (*SH* 840). For this author see A. A. Long, "Timon of Phlius: Pyrrhonist and Satirist," *PCPS* N.S. 24 (1978) 68–91.

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